



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
**Investigative Hearing**

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Metrorail train 302 that encountered heavy smoke in the tunnel between the L'Enfant Plaza Station and the Potomac River Bridge on January 12, 2015

<b>GROUP</b>	
<b>EXHIBIT</b>	

Agency / Organization

Title

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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WMATA INCIDENT AT L'ENFANT PLAZA  
STATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.  
JANUARY 12, 2015

\* Docket No.: DCA-15-FR-004

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: VERONICA HOWARD

Washington, D.C.

Tuesday,  
January 20, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: DAVID BUCHER  
Railroad Accident Investigator

## APPEARANCES:

DAVID BUCHER, Railroad Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

RICHARD DOWNS, JR., Survival Factors Investigator  
Chairman, Survival Factors Technical Working Group  
National Transportation Safety Board

SHARMILA SAMARASINGHE, Vice Chair  
Tri-State Oversight Committee

DORSEY ADAMS, Manager of Rail Safety  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)

HERCULES BALLARD, Managing Director Rail Transportation  
WMATA

THOMAS LITTLETON, FTA Investigator In-Charge  
Associate Administrator for Transit Safety and Oversight  
Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

MARLENE FLEMINGS-McCANN, Assistant Business Agent  
for Rail Operations  
Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689

RICK WALLY, Station Representative Manager  
ATU Local 689

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I N T E R V I E W

(8:40 a.m.)

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2  
3 MR. BUCHER: Good morning this is Dave Bucher, Rail  
4 Accident Investigator for the National Transportation Safety  
5 Board. It's January 20, 2015. And this is the interview of  
6 Veronica Howard. L'Enfant station manager for WMATA. And it's  
7 related to the L'Enfant Plaza accident of January 12, 2015. The  
8 accident number DCA-15-FR-004. To my right I have?

9 MS. SAMARASINGHE: Good morning, Sharmila Samarasinghe.  
10 I'm with the Tri-State Oversight Committee. I'm the full-time  
11 Virginia member.

12 MR. LITTLETON: Hi, Thomas Littleton. I'm the Associate  
13 Administrator For Transit Safety, and Oversight with the Federal  
14 Transit Administration, and the Investigator-in-Charge from the  
15 FTA.

16 MS. HOWARD: Good morning.

17 MS. FLEMINGS-McCANN: Good morning, Marlene Flemings-  
18 McCann. Assistant Business Agent for Rail Operations, Local 689.

19 MS. HOWARD: Good morning.

20 MR. BALLARD: Yes, good morning. My name is Hercules  
21 Ballard, Managing Director Rail Transportation.

22 MR. ADAMS: I'm Dorsey Adams, Washington Metro, Manager  
23 of Rail Safety.

24 MR. DOWNS: Rick Downs, Survival Factors Technical  
25 Working Group Chairperson, NTSB.

1 MS. HOWARD: Good morning.

2 MR. WALLY: And Rick Wally, Local 689, shop steward for  
3 station managers.

4 MR. BUCHER: Great, thank you.

5 INTERVIEW OF VERONICA HOWARD

6 BY MR. BUCHER:

7 Q. Veronica, pretty much like I said, if you could go back  
8 to January 12th, and relate as much as you can remember about the  
9 incident that occurred at the station?

10 A. Okay. It was about, I'll say, 3, 3:15 -- between 3:15,  
11 I'll say, and 3:30. I'll say 3:15 and 3:30. I was coming from my  
12 first block taking a break at L'Enfant to relieve Mr. Howard. I  
13 was in the back in the ancillary room and the custodian, she came  
14 back there, and she was like the station is on fire. I'm like  
15 what you mean? She's like the station is on fire.

16 So I run out -- at that time I came out to assist  
17 Mr. Howard, you know, with evacuating the station, whatever he  
18 needed. At that time I couldn't even see nothing, nothing, like  
19 even my hand in front of me. So Transit, like, bust out the  
20 smoke. Because I didn't see them running in the smoke, they just  
21 bust out of the smoke.

22 MR. DOWNS: Excuse me, Transit officer?

23 MS. HOWARD: Yes. And he was like, evacuate the  
24 station, evacuate the station. At that time I started helping  
25 them evacuate all the customers from out the station up to the

1 upstairs level. At that time we just kind of backed the customers  
2 and I stood out there and helped them, you know, tell where the  
3 different shuttles so the customers could get on. That's about  
4 it.

5 BY MR. MR. BUCHER:

6 Q. Were you taken to medical treatment anywhere?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Okay. Dave Bucher, again. Just a little follow-up.  
9 What accident or -- you're in the little booths at the gates  
10 right?

11 A. I'm in the ancillary room, which is the bathroom.

12 Q. Okay, but your normal position was at what exit?

13 A. 7th and Maryland Avenue.

14 Q. 7th and Maryland Avenue.

15 A. Mezz 82.

16 Q. I'm sorry?

17 A. Mezzanine 82.

18 Q. Mezzanine 82. Okay, thank you.

19 Okay, when the evacuation was ordered by Metro police,  
20 did you open the turnstiles? I mean --

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Were they open so that people could evacuate?

23 A. Yeah, the barriers were open.

24 Q. The barriers were opened?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. The whole station was in fire mode. I mean, the  
3 barriers was open. The elevators was brought up to mezzanine  
4 level and street level, you know.

5 Q. Okay.

6 MR. BUCHER: Okay, I'm going to pass on. Mr. Downs?

7 BY MR. DOWNS:

8 Q. Ms. Howard, thank you for joining us today. Could you  
9 tell us a little bit about your work history? How long you've  
10 been with WMATA?

11 A. I've been with WMATA since April 24, 2006.

12 Q. 2006, okay.

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Were you hired on as a station manager or did you do  
15 some other job first?

16 A. I was a bus operator. Then I went on to train operator  
17 in November 1st of 2007. Then I came to stations in November  
18 2014.

19 Q. From 2007 until '14 you were a?

20 A. Train operator.

21 Q. Train operator, okay.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. So in that -- in your capacity as a station manager  
24 you'd be able to move a train if you had to; is that correct?

25 A. Not as a station manager.



1 Q. You would not be able to move a train?

2 A. No.

3 Q. You're not qualified to move a train in an emergency?

4 A. No, I'm station manager now, so.

5 Q. Okay, thank you.

6 Prior to coming to WMATA, what was your work experience,  
7 please?

8 A. I worked for the Department of Justice and Department of  
9 Interior, the both together 9 years.

10 Q. Okay, and what did you do there?

11 A. I did economics at the Department of Justice, and I was  
12 an administrative assistant at Interior.

13 Q. I see, thank you. Previous to that what did you do?

14 A. I used to work for VOCA. It's a mentally ill  
15 institution. VOCA.

16 Q. VOCA?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Thank you. And prior to that?

19 A. Prior to that maybe some summer jobs, I'm not that --

20 Q. Do you have any college, academic training, professional  
21 training?

22 A. Yes, yes. I have my B.S. in business administration.

23 Q. Bachelor of business administration?

24 A. Um-hum.

25 Q. Thank you.

1 A. Yes. Slash legal services, slash legal services.

2 Q. Legal services, okay, thank you.

3 A. That's my minor.

4 Q. Okay. All right. On the day of the event, tell us  
5 about your radio. You're issued a radio, correct? A handheld  
6 radio?

7 A. Well, I didn't have it. Mr. Howard had it. Again, I  
8 was on my break. I was there to relieve him once he was completed  
9 with his duties.

10 Q. I see. And is it that your particular assignment that  
11 day, you go around relieving people when they're on their break,  
12 or how does that work?

13 A. No, I had a block, meaning that I work from -- I work  
14 from Branch Avenue from 8 to 1. Then I left there and I supposed  
15 to took over from 4 to closing at L'Enfant Plaza. So I had a  
16 break in between all that time. So I went back to L'Enfant so I  
17 could be already stationary to eat my food and just chill out.

18 Q. I see. Okay, so make sure I'm understanding. You had  
19 been earlier working at Branch Avenue?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. And you did not go on duty until 4 p.m. at L'Enfant.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. So you came back to L'Enfant a little bit earlier in  
24 order to take your lunch or whatever.

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. And that's where you were at the time?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay, great. So you were really off duty at the time on  
4 your lunch break or whatever?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay. And when -- according to WMATA operations  
7 practices if you're on a break, you're off duty on a lunch break  
8 or whatever, and the station experiences an emergency, do you  
9 immediately go back on duty? Is that how it works?

10 A. No, you kind of just assist because you work for WMATA.  
11 You just assist with anything if you're in the system, rather on  
12 duty or off duty.

13 Q. I see, okay. And as soon as somebody alerted you to a  
14 smoke environment you immediately began to --

15 A. Help with the situation.

16 Q. With the evacuation, okay.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And you were working that day close to the 7th Avenue  
19 and -- 7th and Maryland Avenue kiosk?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. And you were assisting to take people upstairs from the  
22 mezzanine level up to the outdoor -- topside as it's called?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Are you issued a respirator mask as part of your work  
25 equipment?

1 A. Do I have one? No.

2 Q. No. You were never issued a respirator mask?

3 A. No.

4 Q. Okay. Have you participated in any training drills as  
5 part of your work activities as a station manager?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Tell us about the most recent one that you can remember?

8 A. Well, it was just a station manager class.

9 Q. Pardon me?

10 A. It was a station manager class, or you talking just go  
11 through a drill or?

12 Q. Yes. Tell us your recollection of the most recent one  
13 that you had conducted, you had participated in.

14 A. I'd say custom was the last. No -- a lady was -- a guy  
15 who had tapped the side of the train and they thought he was  
16 struck by the train, but he wasn't.

17 Q. And that was a drill scenario?

18 A. No, it wasn't drill; it was an actual event.

19 Q. It was an actual event?

20 A. Yeah, all my drill scenarios was in class.

21 Q. In class?

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. And when was that last class conducted; do you remember?

24 A. My class was November.

25 Q. November of 2014?

1 A. '14, yes.

2 Q. Okay. As part of your training process, evacuations are  
3 addressed in the training; is that correct?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. In addition to the evacuation processes, what other  
6 things do you recall in your training that were provided to you?

7 A. They just gave me different procedures, how to run the  
8 station, how to work the cars, the basics.

9 Q. I see, I see, okay. But you did not have a radio that  
10 particular day?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Mr. Howard had the radio?

13 A. Yes. He was on duty.

14 Q. That you could have used?

15 A. Yeah, but he was on duty so he had the radio.

16 Q. So you pass around a radio when you're on duty, and when  
17 you go off duty for lunch or something you leave that with  
18 whoever's on duty; is that how it works?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. I see. In your experience with the radios in the  
21 station, do they work pretty good?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. No troubles?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Nothing that --

1 A. I haven't experienced too many.

2 Q. Nothing that you've experienced?

3 A. Certain places you might have bad spots.

4 Q. Okay, and you're able to work around that to a certain  
5 degree?

6 A. Uh-huh. It's hard.

7 Q. It's hard?

8 A. Yes.

9 MR. DOWNS: Okay, I'll pass the questions on, thank you.

10 BY MR. ADAMS:

11 Q. Hi, Ms. Howard, how you doing?

12 A. Hi, how are you.

13 Q. Just are you CPR, first aid trained?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. You are?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Okay. And when you're in training and you're going  
18 through different scenarios did you ever go through a scenario  
19 quite like this event, for smoke or fire in the station?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay, so you did go through that in your training?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Is that a tabletop exercise or something?

24 A. Yes, yes.

25 MR. ADAMS: Okay, no more questions.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't have any questions.

2 BY MS. FLEMINGS-McCANN:

3 Q. Marlene Flemings-McCann, Assistant Business Agent for  
4 Rail 689. Ms. Howard, first of all I want to say thank you --

5 A. You're welcome.

6 Q. -- for coming off your break at that crucial time when  
7 Mr. Howard needed your assistance. Because you could have went  
8 another direction, but you chose to do the right thing and I  
9 appreciate your assisting.

10 You're so fresh out of class --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- that hopefully this will be the last one that you  
13 have, drill you have to worry about or emergency. But the radio,  
14 when you're on break, you don't have a radio, right?

15 A. Correct.

16 Q. So you basically was following instructions of who?

17 A. Transit.

18 MS. FLEMINGS-McCANN: Okay, that's all I wanted to know.

19 MS. HOWARD: Okay.

20 MR. LITTLETON: Hi, Tom Littleton with the FTA, no  
21 questions.

22 MS. HOWARD: Okay.

23 MS. SAMARASINGHE: Sharmila Samarasinghe with the Tri-  
24 State Oversight Committee. Ms. Howard, I have a few questions.

25 MS. HOWARD: Okay.

1 BY MS. SAMARASINGHE:

2 Q. You mentioned training. And you mentioned that there is  
3 a station manager training class.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Is that a one-time thing when you become a station  
6 manager or do you have recertification at certain intervals?

7 A. Yeah, you have refresher.

8 Q. Okay, and how frequently are those?

9 A. I believe it's every 2 years.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Um-hum. Every 2 years.

11 BY MS. SAMARASINGHE:

12 Q. Okay, all right, thank you. You mentioned that as you  
13 were coming off of break and the station was kind of being  
14 engulfed with smoke you saw Metro Transit PD personnel --

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. -- rushing around. Did they give you an indication that  
17 they had essentially started evacuating the passengers out of the  
18 station platforms and the trains, or were they just running and  
19 you all kind of made the determination, okay, there seems to be an  
20 emergency, we need to get ourselves and the passengers that we can  
21 reach out of the station? Who gave the, kind of, the positive  
22 command to evacuate the station?

23 A. Transit.

24 Q. Transit?

25 A. Yes.



1 Q. Okay, all right. Can you also explain the communication  
2 methods you have at your disposal as a station manager? I  
3 understand you were still on break and assisting Mr. Howard, but  
4 what kind of communication do you have at your disposal while  
5 you're inside the kiosk and while you're making the rounds in  
6 terms of communicating with ROCC or whoever else you would need to  
7 communicate if you see something unusual taking place?

8 A. I have the telephone inside the kiosk.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. The radio, the ETS boxes.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. That's pretty much it.

13 Q. All right. So if you were doing like a station  
14 inspection walk, you would have your radio with you?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay. And in the past few months, in general, how has  
17 your radio operations been in terms of when you needed to use it,  
18 has it worked? Not only at L'Enfant, but you said you have worked  
19 at Branch Avenue, and wherever else you work, has your radio given  
20 you any problems in terms of not being able to communicate with  
21 the people you need to communicate with at the times that you  
22 needed it?

23 A. Sometimes you have bad spots, again.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. It depends on where you're standing at.

1 Q. Okay, all right. So you have the telephone inside the  
2 kiosk.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. You have the radio at all times when you're outside the  
5 kiosk.

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And if everything fails, you still have the phones in  
8 the ETS boxes to communicate with ROCC?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. And the last question I have is, you mentioned that the  
11 station was in fire mode.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. You mentioned that the elevators had come up to the  
14 surface level and stopped.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. You mentioned that the fare gates had opened.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Had the escalators stopped as well?

19 A. Yeah, they stopped.

20 MS. SAMARASINGHE: Okay, all right. Okay, thank you.

21 MS. HOWARD: You're welcome.

22 MR. BUCHER: Dave Bucher again. I just have a couple  
23 follow-up questions.

24 MS. HOWARD: Okay.

25 BY MR. BUCHER:

1 Q. The first, and I just want to make sure, you said that  
2 you were -- you would have gone back on duty at 4:00. What was  
3 your -- would have been the end of your shift, 4 to?

4 A. 12:30.

5 Q. 12:30?

6 A. Closing, yes.

7 Q. Okay. All right, just wanted to make sure. Thank you.

8 During the incident did you ever go back to the station  
9 platforms at all to assist with the people coming out or you  
10 stayed at the kiosk?

11 A. I stayed at the mezzanine level, again, because Transit  
12 was like evacuate the station.

13 Q. Okay. Okay, and just one question, I just want to be  
14 clear on Mr. Howard's position. He was the station manager at the  
15 7th Avenue kiosk? Is that what --

16 A. Yes.

17 MR. BUCHER: Okay, great. Okay, that's all I have.  
18 I'll pass it off again.

19 BY MR. DOWNS:

20 Q. Downs, NTSB. Ms. Howard, did you experience any kind of  
21 medical difficulties as a result of the smoke in the station? Did  
22 you get taken to the hospital or anything?

23 A. No, I didn't.

24 Q. You were okay?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Okay, great, thank you. What I like to do as one of my  
2 last questions is to, now that you've had few days to think about  
3 the event --

4 A. Okay.

5 Q. -- we like to offer the opportunity for you to offer any  
6 retrospective thought. What that means, now that you think of it  
7 in your mind, if you -- knowing what you know now --

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. -- would you have done anything differently or can you  
10 offer any suggestions to either WMATA or the emergency responders  
11 or anybody how better to handle a future event? You've never had  
12 an event like this before; is that correct? Of this magnitude?

13 A. Correct, yes.

14 Q. Given that it was quite a bit of an event, would you  
15 have done anything differently or can you offer any suggestions as  
16 to how to better manage the event? We're not suggesting anything  
17 was done wrong, but sometimes little things do come up that you  
18 see now that you didn't see at the time.

19 A. No. I would have did exactly what I done.

20 Q. Exactly the same?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. No thoughts or suggestions?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Okay, thank you.

25 A. You're welcome.

1 MR. ADAMS: I have a question.

2 BY MR. ADAMS:

3 Q. Dorsey Adams, just one more question. Would you have  
4 wanted some kind of respirator or mask in that event?

5 A. It would have been nice to have one.

6 Q. Excuse me?

7 A. I said, it would have been nice to have one.

8 MR. ADAMS: Okay, no more questions.

9 MR. BALLARD: Hercules Ballard, no questions.

10 MS. FLEMINGS-McCANN: No questions.

11 MS. HOWARD: Okay.

12 MR. LITTLETON: Tom Littleton, no questions.

13 MS. SAMARASINGHE: Sharmila Samarasinghe, Tri-State  
14 Oversight Committee. Ms. Howard I have a couple of questions.

15 BY MS. SAMARASINGHE:

16 Q. I forgot to ask you, when the station was in fire  
17 mode --

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. -- were the fire alarms going off, and the strobe  
20 lights that are --

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Yes? They were all active?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Did you encounter the train operator of the train that  
25 was stopped at the platform, Train 510, did you encounter the

1 train operator or the rail transit supervisor either while you  
2 were at the kiosk getting ready to evacuate or once you got on to  
3 topside?

4 A. No.

5 MS. SAMARASINGHE: Okay, thank you.

6 MS. HOWARD: You're welcome.

7 MR. BUCHER: Dave Bucher, NTSB, no further questions.

8 MR. BALLARD: No further questions.

9 MS. FLEMINGS-McCANN: No further questions.

10 MR. LITTLETON: No further questions.

11 MS. SAMARASINGHE: No. Thanks.

12 MR. BUCHER: This concludes the interview of Ms. Howard

13 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: WMATA INCIDENT AT L'ENFANT PLAZA  
STATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.  
JANUARY 12, 2015  
Interview of Veronica Howard

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-14-FR-004

PLACE: WMATA Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

DATE: January 20, 2015

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,  
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed  
to the best of my skill and ability.

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Keith J. Maurer  
Transcriber